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Femininity on Trial:
Decoding Media Representations of Mary Winkler

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Report

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

December 2012

Abstract

Femininity on Trial:
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The University of Texas at Austin, 2012

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As the main vehicle through which the majority of the population comes to understand the world around them, the media has the power to dominate public opinion, reinforce traditional notions and introduce new ideologies. With regards to gender, the media's role is two-prong: it pathologizes and highlights gender deviance, and simultaneous reinforces culturally constructed gender norms. The current study examines media representations of Mary Winkler, a Tennessee woman who shot her minister husband to death in 2006. Winkler's role as the wife of a religious and community leader implies high morality, sexual demureness, nurturance and obedience. Because Winkler's involvement in the shooting death of her husband severely conflict with these social and gender role expectations, this work examined how Winkler's position as a minister's wife affect media depictions of her criminality and the implications of these depictions on society's perception of gender, religion, and crime. To answer these questions, 97 newspapers articles produced between April 9th, 2007 (the first day of Winkler's trial) and August 15, 2007 (the date of Winkler's release on parole) were analyzed using

content analysis methodology. The study results show that Winkler's adherence to feminine norms was highly influential in her construction as a sympathetic figure and her receipt of a lesser conviction of voluntary manslaughter.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

A review of the existing scholarship on gender and crime in the United States indicates a gender gap in criminal behavior. Whereas men have been shown to offend at much higher rates for all crime categories except prostitution, women tend to commit far fewer and far less serious crimes (Hedderman, 2003; Humphries, 2009; Kruttschnitt, Gartner & Ferraro, 2002; Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996; Weatherby, Blanch & Jones, 2008). Women are also less likely to have long criminal careers, with many only engaged in brief periods of prostitution, drug-related offenses, or minor crimes such as shoplifting and check forgery (Herrington & Nee, 2008; Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996; Weatherby, Blanch & Jones, 2008). These differences in male and female crime behavior have produced gendered stereotypes that view women to be innately less capable of crime and violence than men (Morris, 1987; Stoll, 1974; Worral, 2001).

Research into the effects of gender stereotyping on media coverage of male and female violence reveals a gap in reporting practices as well. News content analyses consistently show that violent crimes perpetrated by women receive a higher volume of news coverage than those committed by men (Boulahanis & Heltsley, 2004; Heidensohn, 1985; Jewkes, 2004; Morrissey, 2003; Naylor, 2001; Noh, Lee & Felty, 2010; Worral, 1993). In one particular study of news reporting trends, for example, Naylor found that female-perpetrated violence accounted for one-fifth of all crime news stories reported by

the media even though women perpetrated less than 10% of all crimes reported to the police (2001). Other research shows that the media also tended to highlight extreme acts of violence by women while under-representing those offences for which women are typically convicted (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004; Humphries, 2009). These trends suggest that women's violence is culturally constructed to be more transgressive than men's violence and therefore more worthy of news coverage (Boulahanis & Heltsley, 2004; Heidensohn, 1985; Jewkes, 2004; Morrissey, 2003; Naylor, 2001; Noh, Lee & Felty, 2010; Worral, 1993).

Research into media representations of female violence also highlights the limited range of representations offered to criminal women. While male violence is depicted on a spectrum, women's violence is predominately contextualized as pathological (Jewkes, 2004; Morrissey, 2003; Naylor, 2001; Noh, Lee & Felty, 2010; Wilczynski, 1997). Scholars identify the following depictions as being standard in the media's constructions of women who commit serious, violent crimes: as emotional instability or insanity (Barnett, 2006; Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002; Farr, 2000); as evil manipulators (Ballinger, 1996; Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002; Chesney-Lind, 1999; Farr, 1997; Grabe, Trager, Lear & Rauch, 2006; Huckerby, 2003; Wilczynski, 1991); as victims of domestic abuse (Jewkes, 2004; Morrissey, 2003); as sexual deviants (Benedict, 1992; Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002; Bond-Maupin, 1998; Farr, 1997; Jewkes, 2004; Morrissey, 2003); as bad mothers and wives (Barnett, 2006; Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002; Grabe et al., 2006; Huckerby, 2003; Naylor, 2001; Morrissey, 2003; Wilczynski,

1991); as physically (un)attractive (Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009; Frigon, 2006; Jewkes, 2004; Millbank, 1996; Morrissey, 2003; Seal 2010); and as non-agents (Jewkes, 2004; Morrissey, 2003; Seal, 2010). These depictions reinforce feminine norms by constructing female criminality in terms of gender deviance.

The current study examines media representations of Mary Winkler, a Tennessee woman who shot her minister husband to death in 2006. Winkler's role as the wife of a religious and community leader implies high morality, sexual demureness, nurturance and obedience. Because Winkler's involvement in the shooting death of her husband severely conflict with these social and gender role expectations, this work is interested in two broad research questions: first, how does Winkler's position as a minister's wife affect media depictions of her criminality? and second, what do these depictions reveal about society's perception of gender, religion, and crime? To answer these questions, 97 newspapers articles produced between April 9th, 2007 (the first day of Winkler's trial) and August 15, 2007 (the date of Winkler's release on parole) were analyzed using content analysis methodology. Analysis reveals that Winkler's adherence to feminine norms – in particular, her sexual propriety, high moral value, and motherliness – was highly influential in her construction as a sympathetic figure and her receipt of a lesser conviction of voluntary manslaughter.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 The Newsworthiness of Women's Violence

Media theorists understand the news as a representation of reality constructed by journalists, news editors, and media elites who produce and transmit news stories to the public (Cohen & Young, 1998; Fowler, 1991; Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Gilchrist, 2010; Hall, 1973; Jewkes, 2004; Schudson, 1989; Tuchman et al, 1976). Rather than reporting the millions of events that take place daily, newsmakers selectively cover the occurrences that they deem to be "newsworthy," or events that they believe will appeal to the public and are within the public interest (Cohen & Young, 1998; Jewkes, 2004; Schudson, 1989; Tuchman et al, 1976). Although the specific criteria of newsworthiness are dependent upon the individual reporter or news organization (Chermak, 1995), generally speaking, newsworthy events are unusual, sensational, dramatic and full of conflict, with additional features such as action and deviance increasing its newsworthiness (Ericson et al, 1987).

In terms of crime news, research has shown that severe interpersonal crimes, such as homicide, are over-represented in the news, while more common misdemeanor or property crimes are ignored or de-emphasized (Chermak, 1995; Ericson et al., 1987; Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1973). Within the category of violent crimes, the gender of the victim and offender also affects the likelihood of the story being selected for publication. Jewkes (2004) has noted that particular forms of violence against women committed in the home, by acquaintances, and/or those that are non-fatal, are considered too

commonplace by newsmaker to be considered newsworthy and are left off of the news agenda. On the other hand, extreme acts of violence perpetrated by women tend to be over-reported in the news (Jewkes, 2004; Humphries, 2009), while the offences that women typically commit – drug-related offences, property crimes – are under-represented in the media (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004).

Feminist media scholars suggest that this gender gap in news reporting is rooted in cultural ideas about femininity and appropriate feminine behavior (Brennan, 2002; Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009; Broverman et al., 1972; Huckerby, 2003; Naylor, 2001). Because women are expected to be good wives and mother, qualities that are associated with these gender roles (e.g., nurturance, emotionality, non-aggressiveness, passiveness, and self-sacrifice) have been culturally normalized and inducted as norms of Western femininity (Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009). Thus, when women behave in ways that contradict gender role expectations, their actions are perceived to be more deviant, unusual and newsworthy.

2.2 NEWS FRAMING AND STOCK NARRATIVES OF FEMALE DEVIANCE

In addition to its role in the news selection process, gender stereotypes also affect *news framing*, the process through which journalists construct a cohesive news story around a particular news event. According to Entman, when framing, journalists "select and highlight some features of reality and obscure other in a way that tells a consistent

story about problems, their causes, and moral implications, and remedies" (1993). The resulting narrative greatly impacts how the audience defines social and gender norms and deviance, and – in the incidents of women's violence – how they understand women's experiences of crime and violence (Chermak, 1995; Jewkes, 2004; Meloy & Millers, 2009). In particular, journalists' use of descriptors when characterizing a victim, offender, or crime greatly influence how the audiences understand the event (Meloy & Miller, 2009). Henley, Miller and Beazley (1995), for example, found that when news stories of violence against women are written in passive voice, readers attributed less responsibility to the offender and were seemingly more acceptable of the abuse. Similarly Lamb and Keon (1995) found that when reading articles that implied that battered women played a role in their own victimization – "why didn't she leave?" – the audience were more likely to show leniency in punishment for the batterers. These studies clearly indicate that how a story is framed directly impacts the audience's understanding of gender, crime, and violence.

Researchers have found that journalists predominately used stock narratives of insanity, victimhood, or pure evil to frame news stories about women's violence (Ballinger, 1996; Barnett, 2006; Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002; Chesney-Lind, 1999; Farr, 2000; Grabe et al., 2006; Huckerby, 2003; Jewkes, 2004; Morrissey, 2003; Naylor, 2001; Noh, Lee & Felty, 2010; Wilczynski, 1997). Frigon (2006) and Birch (1993) posit that this practice occurs because Western societies do not have a language with which to explain the existence of violence and cruelty in those who are socially constructed as

inherently passive, nurturing, and good. To explain this gender incongruence, journalists appropriate stock narratives of insanity, emotionality, or pure evilness that contextualize the incident as individual pathology (Birch, 1993; Frigon, 2006; Jewkes, 2004). These narratives help journalists to simplify complicated, incoherent events into familiar storylines and reinforce gender stereotypes (Jewkes, 2004). In this following section, six dominant narratives and themes in news depictions of series female offenders are discussed.

2. 3 THE "INSANITY / MENTAL INSTABILITY" FRAME

The media often use narratives of insanity or mental instability in cases when women perpetrate violent crimes against their children or spouses. Because these crimes most blatantly violate socially designated roles for women, they are also the hardest for the public to understand. To construct a concise, digestible news story around these unfathomable events, newsmakers use stock narratives of reproductive or abuse-induced madness as a way to explain why some women injure or kill those who they are expected to nurture, support and protect.

This narrative is primarily serves to excuse the actions of the female offenders by depicting them as victims of circumstances (Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009). These women are portrayed as not being responsible for their actions because they suffer from a biological malady or medical condition that affected their judgment (Barnett, 2006;

Berrington & Honkatukai, 2002; Edwards, 1986; Huckerby, 2003; Naylor, 2001; Wilczynski, 1991). Variations of this "mad" narrative includes premenstrual stress-induced violence (Heidensohn, 1996), post-partum depression induced infanticide (Barnett, 2006; Hamilton & Harberger, 1992; Hickman & LeVine, 1992), and the Battered Women's Syndrome narrative, where women who have been subjected to physical, sexual, and/or psychological abuse strike back against their intimate partners in self-defense (Dobash & Dobash, 1992; Humphries, 2009). To further this "victim" narrative, the media often uses the offender's feminine appearance, adherence to traditional gender roles and responsibilities, sexual purity, and religious nature – all attributes of the ideal Western womanhood – to characterize her as a sympathetic figure (Barnett, 2006; Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002; Grabe et al, 2006; Farr, 2000; Huckerby, 2003; Wilczynski, 1991). Authoritative figures – such as mental health professors – are also brought in to testify that the defendants' mental state at the time of the crime did not constitute a guilty sentence (Barnett, 2006; Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002; Grabe et al, 2006; Farr, 2000; Huckerby, 2003; Wilczynski, 1991).

2.4 THE "PURE EVIL" FRAME

When women are not easily understood as victims, or have qualities that challenge a sympathetic portrayal – such as being lesbian, a racial minority, or a member of a lower socioeconomic class – they are shown to have perpetrated violence against

their loved ones because they are pure evil (Jewkes, 2004). These women are usually depicted as sexually deviant, masculine or unattractive in appearance or personality, and are condemned for being failures as women, as mothers and as wives (Ballinger, 1996; Barnett, 2006; Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002; Chesney-Lind, 1999; Farr, 1997; Grabe et al., 2006; Huckerby, 2003; Jewkes, 2004; Naylor, 2001; Seal, 2010; Wilczynski, 1991). The "pure evil" narratives reconciles the deviance and violence in criminal women by depicting them as defective women or not women at all (Jewkes, 2004). In this way, the audience is offered an easily digestible, sensation story for consumption.

2.5 THE "SEXUAL DEVIANCE" FRAME

Sexual deviance is one of the dominant methods through which the media condemns violent female offenders. In this narrative, women's violence is characterized as a sexual event, and their aggressive behavior explained through their abnormal sexual practices and preferences. The sexual deviance narrative can be categorized into three main categories, as sexual perversion/dysfunction, erotomania, and sexual slavery. Although each category has distinct characterizations, elements of each can be interspersed within a single news story (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2008).

Lesbianism and Non-Heterosexual Identities:

In this type of sexual deviance narrative, the media depicts heterosexuality as the acceptable norm, and women's violence as a result of deviations from or perversions of this norm. For example, criminal women who are lesbian or suspected of lesbianism are frequently monsterized, with their sexual orientation depicted as the cause of their crime (Jewkes, 2004; Millbank, 1996; Morrissey, 2003; Seal, 2010). Jewkes posits that the sexual deviance narrative offers journalists a convenient explanation for a women's involvement in a violent, heinous crime because lesbianism and bisexuality are stigmatized in Western society as unnatural sexual identities (Jewkes, 2004; Morrissey, 2003; Seal, 2010; Wykes, 2001). Through the use of cultural stereotypes about lesbianism and lesbians – that they hated all men, society and the institution of family (Millbank, 1996) – the media is able to effectively remove the female offenders' humanity. In this way, the media is able to depict her actions as the behavior of a lesbian monster, rather than those of a natural woman.

Sexual Perversion and Erotomania

When violent women cannot be simplistically constructed as lesbians because of their relationships with male accomplices or male victims, journalists typically depict these women as sexually perverse, erotomaniacs/nymphomaniacs, or as love fools. Whereas the "lesbianism" tale emphasize "heterosexuality" as the social and sexual

norm, this category of narratives juxtapose heterosexual criminal women against the ideal, respectable "normal" women who have discrete and controlled sex drives (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2008). These narratives typically depict violent women as being driven to commit crimes by their all-consuming sexual urges or their obsession with their own sexual powers. News stories with the erotomaniac frame typically presents the offender as a promiscuous, unfaithful woman, who is addicted to sex and romance, and who kills when someone stands in the way of her happiness (Manners, 1995; Sjoberg & Gentry, 2008). Variations of this frame also depict the female offender as an evil seductress who kills because she is obsessed with her own sexuality and her ability to entice others to obey her commands (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2008). In this narrative, the offender's uncontrolled sexuality becomes a key representation of her guiltiness, and her murders are effectively transformed into a sexualized tale (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2008).

Love fool

This narrative presents women's violence as "passion killings" or "crimes of passion" (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2008; Morrissey, 2003). Crime stories with this framing typically follow two storylines, one in which the woman is seen as a pawn used by her male accomplice for sexual pleasure as well as violence, and the second in which the woman appears as a love fool who commits violence out of her great passion or love for a man. When a woman commits crime alongside her male accomplice, journalists frame

the violence as the men's choice and plan, and the women as submissive accomplices who went along with the plan because they were physically or emotionally controlled by the men (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2008). Rather than representing the offender as an active participant and aggressor in the crimes, an idea that challenges social and gender norms, the media frames the woman's violent actions as the extension of her male partners, thereby negating the necessity of explaining her actions (Morrissey, 2003).

Conclusion

The characterization of violent women as sexual deviants figures prominently in the media discourse because it allows journalists to avoid the unthinkable – that those society views as essentially good can be capable of violence and evil. Through the images of the lesbian monster and the erotomaniac, journalists can reconcile the actions of violent, criminal women by depicting them as pathological or abnormal: if they are not fully women, then their actions do not challenge social constructions of women as inherently good. Similarly, by framing women's violence as being motivated by love or sexual devotion, the media makes their actions relatable. In this way, the media is able to sensationalize violent women's actions while preserving and reinforcing gender norms and expectations.

2.6 THE "PHYSICAL APPEARANCE" FRAME

In addition to sexuality, the media also places great emphasis upon the physical appearances of violent, criminal women. Articles on women who kill often concentrate on how they are dressed and their body language, a practice that Jewkes sees as reflective of other aspects of general life (2004). She writes that women are subjected to the male gaze on a daily basis, and that "this gendered narrative underpinning media discourses within advertising, women's magazines, tabloid newspapers and so on, extends to news discourse and includes constructions of female criminality" (Jewkes, 2004). In a society with specific ideals of feminine beauty, female criminal are predominantly constructed in two ways: as either an unattractive and masculine unnatural woman, or a dangerous femme fatale who hides her deviance behind her beauty.

Ugly, Inside and Out

When it comes to violent women who do not reflect the ideal feminine beauty, journalists often depict their physical appearance as the root of their crime. On the rare occasion when the crime involves a female perpetrator and a female victim, journalists may frame the news story as a story about sexual and romantic rivalry, that the offender killed her victim because she was jealous of the victim's appearance and her closeness with the offender's partner (Seal, 2010). Even if there is little evidence to support this

narrative, journalists may play up the narrative of the unwanted, jealous woman if it serves as a convenient explanation for her involvement in the murders (Morrissey, 2003).

Journalists may also portray a female offender's appearance as the physical manifestation of her depravity. In one study, Millbank found a direct correlation between physical appearance and the offender's presumed guiltiness (1996). A comparison of the physical appearances of four women who murdered a stranger revealed that the physical descriptions of each woman correspond directly with their assumed guiltiness in the crime, with the most attractive of the four being acquitted of her charges and the most masculine and unattractive receiving the harshest sanction (Millbank, 1996). These representations suggest that criminal women are not only tried for their crime, but they are also unfairly judged for not meeting society's ideal feminine beauty.

Dangerous Beauty

On the other side of the spectrum, women who are considered conventionally attractive are also unfairly depicted by the media. These women are frequently portrayed as the femme fatale, a dangerous and seductive woman who ensnares victims with their beauty (Jewkes, 2004; Morrissey, 2003; Frigon, 2006). Unlike masculine women whose physical appearance reflect their inner criminality, the physical attractiveness of certain female offender are used to dramatize the contrast between their femininity and their violent actions. In this way, the female offender's beauty is used to frame the news story

as a cautionary tale against trusting beautiful women whose outer appearance masks their inner evil.

Conclusion

The emphasis place upon the physical appearance of the violent female offenders trivializes the severity of their crimes into a story about feminine beauty. When the offenders are not conventionally attractive, the media suggests that their crimes are rooted in a hidden anger, jealousy, or envy against a society that does not want or desire them. On the other hand, when the offenders are beautiful, they are reduced to a one-dimensional foil for the kind of woman that all men should marry and all women should emulate (Frigon, 2006; Jewkes, 2004; Morrissey, 2003). To be sure, at times, news stories also mention details about the physical characteristics of male criminals. However, these descriptors are often used to explain how a criminal could escape the scene of the crime, or to explain a particular aspect of the police investigation (Nacos, 2004). Unlike news stories of women's violent crimes, these characterizations are not contextualized as an explanatory for the crime itself. News focus upon women's physical appearance distract the audience from analyzing why these women perpetrate violence by offering familiar stock narratives of vanity and jealousy, both recognized to be stereotypically feminine qualities.

2.7 THE DOMESTIC FRAME

One other method through which the media explains female violence is to present their crime through the lens of wifedom and motherhood. As previously discussed, "Wife" and "Mother" are traditionally accepted as the natural gender role for women (Worral, 1993), and as such, they can provide journalists with relatable explanations for why some women commit murders. In some cases where mothers kill their partners, journalists employ the "mother hen" narrative and represent the crime as a woman acting on her maternal instincts to protect her children (Jewkes, 2004). These women are presented in sympathetic light, and their actions are seen as naturally *feminine* actions (Jewkes, 2004; Morrissey, 2003; Seal 2010). By showing that her violence was motivated by maternal love, the media is able to neutralize the perceived threat of the mother as a violent offender (Cecil, 2007).

On the other hand, for women who do not easily fit into the feminized "mother hen" storyline, the media resorts to the "flawed wife/mother" narrative. In this narrative, the media depicts the female offender as an unsatisfactory wife or mother in order to pathologize the offender or construct her as purely evil (Jewkes, 2004). Oftentimes, the female offender are portrayed as a nagging or negligent wife who murdered her husband to escape from a life she did not want (Wykes, 1995). This narrative frame discredits any claims of abuse made by the offender by showing her to be cunning and deceitful. Through this depiction of the violent woman as a bad wife and a bad woman by

association, the media suggests that she is either deserving or is partly responsible for the spousal abuse.

In addition to spousal homicides, the flawed wife/mother narrative has also been appropriated by the media for cases in which mothers kill their children. Barnett found that news accounts predominantly presented two different types of flawed mothers: the first group was characterized as good mothers who killed because they were mentally ill, and in the second group were bad mothers who put their personal pleasure and convenience above their maternal sacrifice (2006). Peter suggests that women who kill their children are depicted in these polarizing ways because society expects its mothers to be nurturing and cannot easily fathom why some mothers behave otherwise (2006). Because society is unable to comprehend such acts, it attempts to "marginalize (or make sense of) women's violence through constructs such as mad, bad/evil, or victim" (Peter, 2006).

Conclusion

The prospect that women, particularly those who are mothers and wives, can rationally commit murder is too abhorrent for society to comprehend. Rather than examining the complexities of women's lives that can lead to violent or criminal behavior, journalists use simplistic narratives of flawed motherhood and undesirable marriages to explain why some women kill their spouses and children. These narratives

reflect the underlying societal assumptions that all women are natural wives and mothers, and those who do not comply with social norms are defective women.

2.8 THE "NON-AGENT" FRAME:

In the end, all of the above narratives reinforce the cultural perception that "real" women are not capable of violence and crime, a stereotype that deny women who kill of their humanity and their agency. Women's violence is rarely depicted as justifiable, as demonstrated in the prevalence of the "Insanity" or "Pure evil" narrative in the media discourse. Under the "Insanity" framework, criminal women are often depicted as victims of a terrible mental defect or long-term abuse. Accordingly, when she kills her abusive partner, her actions are perceived to be irrational, but excusable, since she was not mentally competent to appreciate the wrongness of her crime; this portrayal reinforces gender stereotypes that real, healthy women are not capable of crimes by shifting the blame to the woman's experience of abuse or to her mental instability (Jewkes, 2004). Similarly, narratives of "Pure Evil" narrative deny the possibility that women can kill *as women*, by depicting violent female offenders as inhuman monsters. From these dominant narratives emerge the "Non-Agency" framework, one that explicitly denies women's involvement in a violent crime as rational. This media framework reinforce gender norms by emphasizing the offender's lack of involvement or unwilling involvement in a particular crime (Jewkes, 2004).

Chapter 3: Data and Methodology

Feminist media study is concerned with how media representations of men and women produce and reproduce dominant ideologies about gender roles and gender norms (Kim, 2008). This field of media studies recognizes that news media has the power to "define serious topics of public interests and to identify major players in political, economic, and social processes" (Byerly, 1999). Feminist media study acknowledges that access to ownership and control of the media industry is unequal and that the media is another arena in which women are oppressed under patriarchal capitalism (Kim, 2008). Because the media actively selects which "truths" to sell, it constructs and sustains a reality that parrots existing gender expectations and gender norms. This research recognizes that media "messages can act as teachers of values, ideologies, and beliefs and that they can provide images for interpreting the world whether or not the designers are conscious of this intent" (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992). It is the goal of this research to tease out these values and ideologies and examine the social perception of gender, religion, and crime.

3.1 Content Analysis and Coding

This research appropriates a content analysis methodology to qualitatively and systematically analyze news coverage of Mary Winkler's trial. Content analysis allows

researchers to code for themes and concepts within the research corpus, and to make inferences and generalities from these findings (Berelson, 1952; Krippendorff, 1980; Weber, 1990; Stempel, 2003). The reliability and validity of content analysis is dependent upon the soundness of coding practices and research design. For the purpose of this work, which examines how religion, morality, and respectability affects media depictions of female criminality, the research corpus was coded and analyzed for presence of the eight standard narratives of female violence (evil manipulators; emotional instability or insanity; sexual deviance; bad mothers / bad wives; physical appearance; and non-agency) identified in previous scholarship.

Content analysis was conducted on a total of 97 news articles discussing the Mary Winkler trial published between April 9th, 2007 (the first day of Winkler's trial) and August 15, 2007 (the date of Winkler's release on parole). These articles were collected through the premier academic search engine and newspaper database, Factiva, which archives more than 35,000 global news and information sources from 200 countries in 26 languages ("Factiva Source Overview", 2012). Access to Factiva was provided by the University of Texas at Austin Library website.

A Factiva search for the keyword phrase "Mary Winkler" in all articles published in the United States between April 9th, 2007 and August 15th, 2007 yielded 385 articles. Out of these, exact duplicate articles (those with the same news source, author, and verbatim content) as well as news briefings, which were not long enough for in-depth analysis, were eliminated. Transcripts of televised investigative journalism programs,

CNN Newsroom, *Fox News: On the Record with Greta Van Sustern*, and *NBC News Today*, were also eliminated from the research corpus, since the focus of this research is on depictions of Mary Winkler in printed news. Because the eight standard narratives found in the literature were identified through printed news content analysis, the research found the inclusion of televised media to be incompatible with the parameters of the research design. The remaining 97 articles were then coded and analyzed for explanations/narratives addressing Winkler's criminality. The frequency with which each narrative appears in the research corpus is recorded, compared with the standard stock narratives identified in the literature, and then analyzed for meaning. Because the articles cover Winkler's trial, during which both sides – the defense and prosecution – present their explanations of Winkler's involvement to the jury and the public, multiple explanations of Winkler's criminality are found in each news article.

Chapter 4: Mary Winkler, "The Preacher Killer"

In order to understand how media constructs Winkler's innocence or guiltiness, it is crucial to first understand the context of the case. This section provides a brief timeline of the Winkler case as presented in the news.

On the morning of March 22, 2006, Mary Winkler shot her husband Matthew Winkler, a minister of a Church of Christ congregation in Selmer, Tennessee. Matthew Winkler's body was discovered at 9:00pm that night, when a church member arrives at the parsonage to look for the minister who was late for his sermon. Upon finding Matthew Winkler's body and Mary Winkler and their three daughters missing, the church member contacted the police. Winkler and her children were found by Alabama police in their van, unharmed, in a city approximately 500 miles away from Selmer called Orange Beach. The Winklers were taken to the Orange Beach police station where Mary Winkler confessed on tape to killing her husband. Winkler's daughters were placed in the custody of her parents-in-law, and she was extradited back to Selmer, Tennessee, where she awaited trial. Winkler was eventually charged with First-degree Murder.

On April 12th, 2007, Winkler's murder trial began. The defense argued that Winkler was physically, emotionally, and sexually abused by her husband. She was forced watch pornography with her husband, dress up in platform heels and a wig, and engage in sexual activities that she found "unnatural" (Rucker, April 19, 2007). The defense also suggested the Winkler accidentally shot her husband, while attempting to

confront him about his abusive actions toward their youngest daughter, Breanna. The prosecution, on the other hand, argued that Winkler had been writing bad checks after losing money in a Nigerian scam. Desperate to escape her financial situation and to get out of a bad marriage, Winkler shot her husband in cold blood.

After a week of testimonies, and eight hours of deliberations, Mary Winkler was found guilty of voluntary manslaughter, a conviction that would give her a maximum of 5 years. On June 8, 2007, Winkler was sentenced to 210 days in prison, but given credit for 143 she served in jail while waiting for her Grand Jury trial. She was allowed to finish the last 67 days of her sentence in a mental health facility. On August 14, 2007, after serving the entire of her sentence, Winkler was discharged.

Chapter 5: Findings and Discussions

A total of 97 articles published in the United States between April 9th, 2007 (the first day of Winkler's trial) and August 15, 2007 (the date of Winkler's release on parole) were coded and analyzed for their framing of Winkler's violence. Analysis revealed five dominant narratives and explanatory frames of Winkler's criminality in the media discourse as follows: "Abuse" (Winkler is depicted as a victim of long term spousal abuse, and subsequently excused from the crime); "Bank Fraud" (Winkler is said to have been motivated by greed when she shot her husband to death); "Depression / Mental Illness" (Winkler is said to have suffered from dissociative episodes from depression and post-traumatic stress disorder and was not mentally sound at the time of the crime); "Good Mother" (Winkler is said to be using the gun to protect her children from her husband when it discharged), and "Accident" (Winkler is depicted as a non-agent, who was incidentally holding the shotgun when it accidentally discharged). The frequency with which each explanation appears in the corpus was analyzed, and compared for significance and meaning. The findings of this analysis are shown in Table 1 and discussed in detail below.

Table 1: Media Framing of Mary Winkler in News Reporting

Narrative	Number of Articles that Feature this Narrative	Percentage of Total Corpus
Abuse	**81**	**83.5%**
Bank Fraud	34	35.1%
Depression / Mental Illness	16	16.5%
Protecting her Children	18	18.6%
Accident	37	38.1%

5.1 THE ABUSE NARRATIVE:

Content analysis reveals that the dominant stock narrative used to frame Winkler's crime was "Abuse": within the 97 articles analyzed, 81 articles (accounting for 83.5%) mentioned spousal abuse as a leading factor in the shooting death of Matthew Winkler. A large majority of the articles under this framework depicted Mary Winkler as a victim whose subjection to long term spousal abuse has left her without the required state of mind to commit premeditated first-degree murder:

> The psychologist said Mary Winkler suffered from mild depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, which started at age 13 when her sister died and got worse because her husband abused her. She could not have formed the intent to commit a crime because of her compromised mental condition, Zager said. (Rucker, April 18, 2007).

Within these articles, Mary Winkler is seen as a victim in dire need of social and mental assistance rather than a cold-blooded killer deserving of condemnation. Although these narratives typifies Winkler's act as criminal and reproachable, she is seen as blameless

because she is mentally incapable of making rational decisions. This depiction is furthered by the journalists' inclusion of testimony from Winkler's psychiatrist, Lynne Zager. By referencing the opinion of Dr. Zager, a medical expert who supposedly has key insights into Mary Winkler's mental state, journalists effectively bolster the credibility of the abused victim storyline. The inclusion of Dr. Zager's diagnosis and professional jargon ("mild depression" and "post-traumatic stress disorder") provides just enough information to further Zager's credibility as a medical professional, and not enough to allow the audience to make their own interpretations. In this manner, Winkler is expertly transformed into a credible, battered victim.

Additionally, within the "Abuse" narratives, fifty-six (56) articles contribute to Winkler's victim image by specifying the type of abuse Winkler endured – as either "physical," "verbal," "emotion" or "sexual" (breakdown is shown in Table 2).

Table 2: "Abuse" Narrative Break Down

Type of Abuse	Number of Articles that Mention This Type of Abuse	Representative Percentage (Out of 81Articles)
Sexual	38	46.9%
Physical	47	58.0%
Emotional	16	19.8%
"Criticism"	10	12.%
Verbal	13	16.0%
Not Specified	25	30.9%

Forty-seven (47) articles identified the abuse as "physical," noting that Mary Winkler's husband "hit, kicked and pushed her," that "she was treated for a swollen jaw on one occasion and a bruised eye on another," (Buser, April 19, 2007), that he had "threatened her physically with a gun;" and that she had to cover her "terrible bruises with makeup" (Emery, April 9, 2006). These images of physical abuse are particularly effective in reinforcing depictions of Winkler as a victim because her husband and supposed batterer is a religious leader and a prominent figure in the community. Physical violence perpetrated by a man of God is socially unimaginable and vastly condemnable; this greatly elevates the deviance of Matthew Winkler's violence, and in turn adds to Mary Winkler's believability as a sympathetic victim.

Similarly, thirty-eight (38) articles described the abuse as "sexual," depicting Matthew Winkler as a closeted pervert who forced his wife to "engage in sexual acts that she felt was unnatural" (Rucker, April 19, 2007). Judged against his pristine public image, Matthew Winkler's preferences for "white platform-heel shoes," "pornography," wigs and a "very, very short" skirt (Rucker, April 18, 2007) – tame in comparison to other sensationalized stories of sexual sadism in the news – is heavily monsterized, allowing Mary Winkler to appear as the perfect, modest and saintly wife who had endured years of degradation:

> Speaking about their sex life, Mary Winkler spoke quietly and hesitantly, with eyes downcast. She said her husband forced her to view pornography, dress "slutty" and have sex she considered unnatural."[…]
>
> "I was ashamed," she said, explaining why she told no one of the abuse. "I didn't want anybody to know about Matthew." (Rucker, April 18, 2007).

The juxtaposition of Winkler's submissiveness, modesty, and sexual propriety ("spoke quietly and hesitantly, with eyes downcast;" "forced […] to have sex she considered unnatural"; "I was ashamed") with her husband's forcefulness and sexual depravity cements her image as victim. Winkler's testimony that she "didn't want anybody to know about Matthew" also paints her as a devoted wife who did not want to damage her husband's reputation with her testimony. For Winkler – who appears in these articles as the epitome of female subservience, sexual modesty, and wifely devotion – self-serving violence is close to being unthinkable. By condemning her husband as socially and sexually deviant, journalists persuasively characterize Mary Winkler as the true victim of the crime and not the condemnable offender.

In addition to "physical" and "sexual" violence, 16 articles noted that Winkler experienced "emotional" abuse at the hands of her husband, while 13 identified the abuse as "mental." The infrequency with which these types of abuse are mentioned in the text indicates that mental and emotional abuse is considered less newsworthy and less significant than sexual and physical abuse. This is reflective of wider social perceptions about domestic violence. By and large, the public shows strong consensus in indentifying physical and sexual violence as intimate partner violence and less certainty in identifying incidents of mental and emotional abuse the public is also less likely to perceive mental and emotional abuse as illegal (Carlson & Worden, 2005). This problematic and narrow definition of intimate partner violence is reflected, reproduced, and reinforced in media depictions of spousal abuse.

Finally, ten (10) articles that appropriated the "abuse" framework depict Winkler in less sympathetic light, suggesting that she is culpable her husband's murder because she lost control of her emotions:

> Mary Winkler, 33, explained that their domestic problems had reached a boiling point after many years of conflict.
>
> "It's just a lot of stupid stuff," she said. "I love him dearly, but gosh, he just nailed me in the ground ... The first of our marriage, I just took it like a mouse, didn't think anything different. My mom just took it from my dad -- that stupid scenario."
>
> But Winkler said she got a job at the post office, and that experience taught her to stand up for herself. "That's the problem. I have nerve now, and I have self-esteem. My ugly came out." (Rucker, April 13, 2007).

Unlike previously discussed narratives that present Mary Winkler as a blameless victim by monsterising her husband, the use of the descriptors "domestic problems" and "criticism" in the place of "verbal abuse" – a phrase which clearly indicates the intention of one partner to hurt the other – minimizes the severity of the abuse. "Criticisms," after all, are socially acceptable and may even be constructive and positive depending upon the intentions of the critic; similarly the label "domestic problems" suggests commonplace arguments between spouses, rather than criminal acts of control and violence. The journalistic choice in using these descriptors questions the credibility of Winkler's claims of abuse by suggesting that she was exaggerating the severity of their domestic conflicts. Furthermore, by quoting Winkler's explanation of her crime in first person – "I was just tired of it," "I was battling to do that for a long time," "I just got to a point and snapped," – the articles imply that Winkler had a choice in how she responded to her husband's

violence, and that since she overreacted to a domestic spat, she should therefore be held responsible for her crime.

5.2 THE "BANK FRAUD" NARRATIVE:

Out of the 97 articles analyzed, 34 articles (35.1%) depicted Mary Winkler as a cold-blooded murderer, the epitome of "Pure Evil," who murdered her husband because he got in the way of her greed. Within this narrative frame, the Prosecution is cited as the official source, and Mary Winkler is said to have murdered her husband when he got in the way of her bank defrauding schemes:

> Prosecutors have said the couple's account at Regions Bank in Selmer was overdrawn by $5,000, and that bank employees called Mary Winkler several times in the days before Matthew Winkler was found shot to death in the church parsonage ("Slain preacher," April 15, 2007).
>
> Diane Hollingsworth, a teller at Regions Bank, said she talked with Mary Winkler on March 21, 2006 - one day before her husband was found dead in this west Tennessee town.
>
> "I just advised her that if she came in and talked to our bank manager that there would be some way that we could work it out - that it was not an impossible situation," Hollingsworth said. "I advised her if she wasn't able to come in, it would be turned over to our security department." (Rucker, April 15, 2007).

These articles effectively condemn Mary Winkler by pathologizing her avarice, a quality that challenges both the expectations of her gender as well as her social position. Rather than addressing the prevalence of poverty among the clergy as a societal issue, these articles depict Mary Winkler as insatiably greedy, noting that she had withdrawn over

"$5,000" from one bank account, and has been attempting to deposit worthless checks for large sums of money "including one for $7,000" in another (AP, April 14, 2007). These articles question Winkler's integrity – an expected quality in a Minister's wife – and in doing so, question her claims of innocence; after all, a woman who can defraud banks, can certainly kill for money.

Furthermore, twenty-two articles within the "Bank Fraud" frame note that Mary Winkler's involvement in an internet Nigerian Scam had also played a key role in the shooting death of her husband:

> Assistant District Attorney Walt Freeland has said bank managers were closing in on a check fraud scheme that Mary Winkler wanted to conceal from her husband.
>
> He said Mary Winkler had become caught up in a swindle known as the "Nigerian scam," in which people promise nonexistent riches, often by spam e-mail, to victims who send money to cover the processing expenses. (AP, April 13, 2007).

The use of the descriptor "caught up" obfuscates Winkler's level of involvement in the scams, suggesting that Winkler could just as easily have been involved as an accomplice as a victim in these crimes. The arrangement of "check fraud scheme" next to "Nigerian scam" furthers this connotation, implying that the very check fraud scheme Winkler had wanted to conceal from her husband is the fore-mentioned Nigerian Scams. The combined effect leaves a particularly damning image of Mary Winkler, one that challenges the feminine norms of social conformity and morality. In this manner, Winkler is effectively transformed into an unfeminine, low-level criminal, one who is capable of committing murder.

Within the remaining 12 articles that do not mention Winkler's involvement in the "Nigerian Scams," the preacher's wife is equally condemned. These articles note that Winkler committed "a cold-blooded killing following arguments over finances" (Harris, April 19, 2007), and that Matthew Winkler had been murdered right when "bank managers were closing in on a check-kiting scheme that Mary Winkler wanted to conceal" (AP, April 20, 2007). Without providing the audience with specific details regarding these financial arguments, or explanations for Mary Winkler's intentions to conceal her schemes from her husband, the only plausible explanation for Matthew Winkler's murder is that he came between his greedy wife and her money. Paired with visceral images of betrayal, "*he was killed with a single shot that drove 77 steel pellets into his body and left a half- dollar sized hole in the middle of his back"* (Buser, April 13, 2007), these articles transform Matthew Winkler into an innocent victim of his wife's greed and Mary Winkler into the manifestation of pure evil.

5.3 THE "MENTAL ILLNESS" NARRATIVE

Sixteen articles (16) focused upon Winkler's diminished mental capacity at the time of the crime as a way to excuse her involvement in the shooting death of her husband. There are two main variations of this narrative, the first of which suggests that Winkler developed depression and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder following the untimely death of her sister during her childhood, and the second of which indicates that

Winkler experienced Battered Woman's Syndrome after being subjected to prolonged periods of physical, sexual and psychological abuse by her husband. Although both variations minimize Winkler's accountability in her crime by depicting her as mentally incapable of the required intent to murder, they achieve this in different ways.

The childhood PTSD narrative furthers Winkle's image as a sympathetic caretaker and mother by linking her inability to accept the death of her sister with her need to insure the safety of her daughter:

> [Dr. Lynne Zager, Winkler's psychiatrist] said the defendant was left vulnerable to post traumatic stress disorder at age 13 when her 11-year-old disabled sister died of a heart attack in the bathtub in their Knoxville home […]
>
> Zager said Mary Winkler told her that Matthew had placed his hand over their 1-year-old daughter's nose and mouth when she began crying during the night before the shooting. That "concerned her significantly" because the baby had been born with breathing problems, the psychologist added. (Buser, April 18, 2007).

In connecting these two unrelated events together, the articles imply that in her fragile, broken mental state, Winkler was not only using the gun to protect her daughter, she was also confronting the death of her sister. As indicated in Zager's testimony, Winkler's inability to accept the death of her sister elevated her sense of danger, and she saw no other choice than to confront her husband. The use of this journalistic device allows the audience to sympathize with Winkler's past experiences of loss and empathize with her present need to protect her child.

Similarly, the battered wife narrative contributes to the audience's perception of Winkler as a sympathetic figure by rendering her blameless in her own abuse. Previous research has shown that the public has preconceived notions about abusive relationship,

including problematic viewpoints that battered women can leave their batterers if they really wanted to (Follingstad, Polek, Hause, Deaton, Bulger, & Conway, 1989; Schuller & Vidmar 1992; Russell, 2010; Walker, 2009). The inclusion of psychiatrist Dr. Zager's testimony does away with this notion by arguing that Winkler could not freely leave her husband, furthering her image as a blames victim:

> Ballin asked Zager to explain to those who might not understand why someone might stay in that kind of relationship.
>
> "The fear of leaving or the act of leaving makes things worse," Zager replied (Buser, April 18, 2007).

Additionally, this narrative also denies Mary Winkler's responsibility in the murder of her husband by noting that prolonged victimization has left her mentally incapable of processing reality:

> The disorder made it more likely that Mary Winkler would have "dissociative episodes" in which she lost track of her ability to think and feel, as though she were living in a fog, Zager said. (AP, April 20, 2007).

Zager's testimony suggests that Winkler is not capable of murdering her husband because she is not mentally aware of her surroundings at the time of crime. In this manner, the blame of the crime is deftly shifted from Mary Winkler to her batterer, the man who caused her mental and physical harm in the first place.

Finally, through the battered spouse narrative, journalists were also able to transform Winkler's crime from the actions of a pathological individual to a greater social criticism about the psychological pressures on the wives of ministers. This is particularly evident in an article published in *The Christian Century*:

> In a case that focused national attention on the psychological pressures on wives of ministers, Mary Winkler, the wife of a slain Church of Christ pastor in Tennessee, was convicted April 19 of voluntary manslaughter […]
>
> Tony Rankin, who serves as a pastoral and family counselor for the Tennessee Baptist Convention, said pastoral spouses like Mary Winkler can endure many pressures unknown to parishioners. Rankin said he deals each month with more than two dozen instances of silently suffering spouses. ("Slain pastor's wife convicted," May 15, 2007; emphasis added).

Quoting Tony Rankin, a credible subject matter expert in pastoral life, this article normalizes Winkler's experience by depicting her as one among many "silently suffering spouses." This is a particularly critical finding since it presents spousal abuse as a social problem as opposed to an isolated incident. Rather than depicting Winkler as an inferior pastoral spouse, or suggesting that she is somehow blameworthy in her experiences of abuse (a common practice in media coverage of domestic violence) these articles suggest that domestic abuse can affect any family, anyone. In this way, Winkler is not depicted as a gender or social deviant, but a victim of patriarchy and her crime is excused.

5.4 THE "GOOD MOTHER" NARRATIVE

Eighteen (18) out of the 97 articles analyzed suggests that Mary Winkler had unintentionally shot her husband when confronting him about his abuse of their youngest daughter, one-year-old Breanna. Similar to the "abuse narrative," the Good Mother narrative emphasizes Mary Winkler's conformity to feminine norms (she is shown to be a protective, loving mother who is placing herself in danger to save her daughter) while

highlighting her husband's social deviance (his intention to hurt his innocent daughter). By monsterising Matthew Winkler, journalists excuse Mary Winkler's violence by arguing that her actions were motivated by motherly love, a socially acceptable expression of femininity. In this way, Winkler's actions are understood as feminine and therefore comprehensible.

5.5 THE "ACCIDENT" NARRATIVE

Thirty-seven (37) articles accounting for 38.1% of those analyzed noted that the shooting may have been accidental. Under this narrative framework, Winkler is depicted as a non-agent, someone who happened to be holding the shotgun when it accidentally discharged. In this manner, Winkler's involvement is excused and the focus is shifted to whether it is scientifically possible for the faulty weapon to automatically discharge. This is confirmed by a number of articles quoting forensic expert testimony about the technical mechanism of the murder weapon:

> In other testimony Saturday, Tennessee Bureau of Investigation firearms expert Steve Scott testified that Winkler was shot with a Remington 870 Express pump shotgun with a 28-inch barrel and loaded with No. 6 steel birdshot pellets.
>
> "Is it possible to unintentionally discharge a firearm?" Farese [Winkler's attorney] asked.
>
> ""It is possible, yes, sir,"" Scott replied.
>
> Under sometimes-contentious cross-examination by Farese, Scott said a .40-caliber Glock pistol has a trigger pull of between 3 and 8 pounds, depending on how it is designed. (Buser, April 15, 2012).

The articles with the "Accident" framework further minimize Winkler's culpability by suggesting that she had either been experiencing an abuse-induced disassociative episode when the gun discharged (which proves that she did not have the mental capacity for murder) or that Winkler had been protecting her daughter when the gun discharged. Through the latter explanation, Winkler is depicted as a motherly protector, while her husband is seen as a bully who – even though the gun discharged accidentally – deserved to be shot:

> The defense has said Mary Winkler intended to hold her husband at gunpoint only to force him to talk about the incident involving their 1-year-old daughter Breanna. The defense said the shooting was accidental. (Rucker, April 17, 2007).

It is important to note here that these articles maintain that Winkler had only intended to intimidate her husband with the gun, and was not prepared to shoot him. Although Winkler is arguably justified in shooting her husband if he had truly put her children in danger, the journalists' insistence that she had not intended to do so speaks volumes about social perceptions about acceptable femininity. After all, if Winkler had deliberately shot her husband, her actions would problematize her image as a sympathetic figure, pitting her role as a nurturing mother against her expectations to be a supportive wife. Furthermore, an act of violence – even if justified – would violate acceptable feminine norms of submissiveness, nonviolence, and nurturing – leaving Winkler more open to criticism. Ultimately, in order to be truly understood as blameless, Winkler must be depicted as a non-agent in the crime.

Through the "Accident" narrative frame, journalists reinforce the cultural perception that a real woman, such as Winkler, is not capable of violence and crime, by denying her agency. In suggesting that the gun accidentally discharged, the audience sees the faulty gun as the main culprit of the crime, not Winkler herself. Accordingly, when Winkler kills her abusive partner, her actions are perceived to be excusable since she had no motive to kill her husband – her only noble intentions were to protect her children.

Chapter 6: Concluding Thoughts

As the main vehicle through which the majority of the population comes to understand the world around them, the media has the power to dominate public opinion, reinforce traditional notions and introduce new ideologies (Cohen, 1987; Ericson et al., 1987; Grabosky & Wilson, 1989; Naylor, 1995; Wilson, 1988). With regards to gender, the media's role is two-prong: it pathologizes and highlights gender deviance, and simultaneous reinforces culturally constructed gender norms.

The current study examined media framing of Mary Winkler's criminality with respect to her femininity and social position as the wife of a minister. The study results show that Winkler's adherence to feminine norms – in particular, her sexual propriety, high moral value, and motherliness – was highly influential in her construction as a sympathetic figure and her receipt of a lesser conviction of voluntary manslaughter. Although a large percentage of the articles attempted to depict Winkler as a greedy cold-blooded killer, Winkler's believability as a respectable woman and a good mother negated these claims, allowing her to be understood as a blameless victim of abuse. These findings confirm that adherence to gender norms is critical in media's depiction of female criminality.

It is important to address here an important limitation in this research. Although the news articles that form the research corpus are collected from 20 different local, regional, and national news sources, they were largely written and produced by a small

group of journalists – notably Beth Rucker and Woody Baird, who work for the Associated Press, Lawrence Buser from *The Commercial Appeal*, and Theo Emery from *The New York Times*. Clearly, this monopoly of news reporting may affect the applicability of this research to wider generalization about social perceptions about gender, religion, and crime. For the purpose of this research, however, the sample is considered sound since the articles were collected without bias from a single newspaper database. Furthermore, it is important to emphasize here that although different news sources selected the same news stories from a single reporter, each editor modified the stories to reflect their news agenda. For example, Beth Rucker published two articles on April 13, 2006, the first of which – "Preacher's wife admitted fatal shooting; told investigators that 'my ugly came out' " – appeared in the AP Newswire, and the second ("Tennessee: Defense says minister's wife was abused") appeared in Tulsa World. The AP Newswire story clearly implied that Winkler was guilty of murder and indicating that she was emotionally unstable at the time of the crime; the Tulsa World news story, however, emphasizes that Mary Winkler had been verbally, emotionally, and physically abused by her husband, and that the gun discharged accidentally. These editorial choices clearly play a key role in altering the narrative frame of each news story by highlighting some details of the reporting and obscuring others.

Finally, the results raise questions about how readers respond to coverage of domestic violence fatalities. As previously noted, a number of the articles minimized the severity of intimate partner abuse by referring to it as "domestic problems" or spousal

"criticisms," descriptors that still position intimate partner violence in terms of individual and family pathology. A few articles also quoted the presiding judge on the trial, Judge Weber McCraw, who referred to Winkler's actions as "settling *personal disputes* through violent means" (Buser, June 9, 2007, emphasis added). These problematic understanding of domestic violence as "personal," specifically by an official source, reinforce problematic stereotypes of domestic violence as individual or family pathology, rather than prevalent social issue. Although a few articles present domestic violence in a greater social context by noting that spousal abuse is prevalent in pastoral families, no articles present domestic violence as a social problem caused by gender inequalities, and no articles offer readers information about domestic violence-related agencies or resources. Clearly, further research into how readers respond to media depictions of domestic violence and women who kill their batterers should be conducted to better understand the influence of domestic violence stereotypes on social perceptions of battering and women's criminality.

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